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## European Capitals of Culture

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# 11 European Capitals of Culture

## Discourses of Europeanness in Valletta, Plovdiv and Galway

*Cristina Clopot and Katerina Strani*

‘What is Europe? It’s not just a series of banknotes’, an interviewee remarked when asked about European heritage. Our study of European Capitals of Culture (ECoC), one of the main European heritage programmes, proceeds in the same spirit, informed by the complex and disputed discussions of what Europe is (see, for example, Sassatelli 2002) and how, within such shifting grounds, European heritage might be interpreted (see, for instance, Delanty 2017; Niklasson 2017). Described by some as large-scale bottom-up cultural programming (Immler and Sakkers 2014), the ECoC programme has seen several cities across Europe compete for the title of European Capital of Culture for more than three decades now. Our research has focussed on three cities, Valletta as ECoC 2018, Plovdiv as ECoC 2019 and Galway as ECoC 2020. We are conducting a discourse analysis of the submitted bids as the key documents related to each city’s participation in the programme; we are then investigating four common themes that emerge from this analysis: Europe, heritage, diversity and future.

The cities are not chosen at random; all the capitals selected represent edges of Europe and therefore have the potential to illustrate particular challenges based on their geographic and ideological positions. Valletta was chosen as it is the last stand post in the Mediterranean, with a closely connected history (and language) to the African continent. Plovdiv in Bulgaria represents a new EU member (Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007) at the southeast edge of Europe. Galway in Ireland brings a temporal balance by representing an ‘older’ EU member (it joined in 1973) as well as another geographical edge on the west side of the continent. The case of Galway was also chosen because it reflects the revised guidelines for the application process, as discussed below (Immler and Sakkers 2014). Including both newer and older EU members in our analysis can also be justified by the strategic selection of the cities each year, which places on par older and newer EU members to support a concrete process of cultural ‘Europeanisation’ (Lähdesmäki 2014: 482). In investigating the common themes of Europe, heritage, diversity and future, our study aims to answer the following questions:

- How is European heritage (Delanty 2017; Lähdesmäki 2016a,b) presented in the ECoC bids, and how do these cities address the local, European relationship?
- What are the implications of these discourses of Europeanness (Wodak 2007) for current policy?

### **11.1 Setting the scene**

The idea of the ECoC project was shaped by Melina Mercouri, at the time the Greek Minister for Culture, who anticipated the idea at the centre of recent European Union (EU) rhetoric now: ‘unity in diversity’ (EC 2018). Moreover, Mercouri’s vision was shaped by the idea that to strengthen the Union we need a focus beyond economic integration (Immler and Sakkers 2014). Culture was not on the agenda of EU actions at the forefront, but as Calligaro (2014: 61) has noted, it was introduced with an aim of ‘fostering popular support for European integration and strengthening its legitimacy’. Against this backdrop, the ECoC action, managed by the European Commission (hereafter EC), aims, among others, to ‘safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and to highlight the common features they share as well as to increase citizens’ sense of belonging to a common cultural area’ (EC 2014a; original emphasis).

Placing culture, rather than heritage, at centre-stage, the action is presented as an arts and culture initiative. The EC schedules two or more countries per year which are eligible to bid for the title, for four or more years in advance. As we discuss below, this outlines the fragility of the procedure, as cities can undergo major shifts in their political, economic and social life during that period. The nomination has an associated prize of €1.5 million which is awarded at the end of the year-long celebration, if conditions are met. As most ECoC cases have already shown, the budgets for the programme significantly outweigh that figure, and cities such as Glasgow and Liverpool have attracted significant public and private investment following their nomination (see, for instance, Immler and Sakkers 2014; Lähdesmäki 2014). With the programme evolving over time, the EC has commissioned periodic evaluation reports (see, for instance, Palmer 2004; Garcia and Cox 2013) which have constantly outlined the weak ‘European dimension’ in the bids. Garcia and Cox (2013: 15) further found ‘a common disparity between stated objectives (at the bid stage, in mission statements) and their eventual programme implementation’. These shortcomings aimed to be addressed through a set of revised application guidelines for the period 2020 to 2033. As the guide for candidate cities (EC 2014a: 3) notes:

This is a *European* award with standard criteria and objectives defined at EU level. Successful cities combine their local objectives with this European (and often international) aspect.

In this context, our analysis of two bids prepared based on the older guidelines and one prepared based on the revised guidelines is pertinent and necessary.

First, though, a brief consideration of key sources and research on ECoC programmes and EU policies is needed.

## **11.2 Heritage, identity and diversity**

Whereas discussions of European identities are complex and multifarious (see, for instance, Delanty 2017; Sassatelli 2002; Lähdesmäki 2016b), in this study we are particularly interested in notions of Europeanness and European identification that are ‘context-dependent’ (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 89) and serve the purpose of winning the ECoC bid – identification for promotional purposes. We are ultimately investigating how these notions might be indicative of shaping the contours of ECoC as one of the main European heritage programmes.

Given its protracted history, substantive research exists on the ECoC programme and its various cities. A common theme that was addressed in previous studies is that of ‘European identity-building’ (Sassatelli 2002; Palmer 2004; Immler and Sakkers 2014). Sassatelli (2002: 436) argues that Europe ‘is becoming more and more like an icon, if not a totem, whose ambiguous content seems to reinforce the possibilities of identification with it’. In this almost chimerical view of Europe, cultural aspects are constantly renegotiated, and the pendulum swings between unity under European cultural heritage and the celebration of cultures (cf. Shore 2006).

Equally challenging and vague is the notion of ‘European heritage’ (Niklasson 2017; Delanty 2017) that the ECoC programmes aim to promote. The idea of a common, shared heritage is proposed in several actions of the EU (Niklasson 2017), such as the European Heritage Label or the European Year of Cultural Heritage celebrated at the time of writing; however, that does not make its definition or contents more approachable. Delanty (2017) has recently argued that European heritage needs to be considered in terms of connections outside Europe that have shaped the past. In spite of the vagueness of European heritage, Calligaro (2014: 67) observes that ‘to play its function of catalyst of European identity, [European heritage] was expected to give substance to this identity’ and was sometimes defined in terms of shared values. However, branding something as European heritage also has political implications, as the debate over the continent’s Christian heritage has shown, for instance. Still, the contours of European heritage are not made more explicit, but instead the concept is used as a ‘self-explanatory shorthand’s [sic] to address everything from horse breeding practices to endangered Roma heritage’ (Niklasson 2017: 139). To follow Lähdesmäki’s conclusion, European heritage can be conceived in a similar manner to the general concept of heritage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995) ‘as a metacultural practice: its meanings and uses are produced through multilevel cultural, social, societal, political and spatial relationships and operations’ (Lähdesmäki 2016a: 543). The cases considered in this study reflect on this theme and discuss different interpretations of European heritage as seen from the perspective of the candidate cities, both as self-identification and as self-promotion.

'Diversity' is another contested theme and a term commonly used within EU policy and rhetoric, one that has generated significant attention over time. Reflected in the EU's controversial adage 'unity in diversity', the diversity that is proposed is mainly conceived as national and subnational diversity (Shore 2006). It is reflected primarily in notions of nationality and language, or in vague and generic references to 'cultural diversity'. For example, Article I of the *Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* of the Council of Europe (2005) highlights the importance of 'the role of cultural heritage in the construction of a peaceful and democratic society, and in the processes of sustainable development and the promotion of cultural diversity'. It becomes clear that 'Diversity is the EU brand' (Rasmussen 2009: 9, added emphasis). And yet this diversity is superficial, vague and incomplete. It refers merely to the contact between languages and cultures and 'has rather failed to address issues of identity, values and inclusion' (Delli 2017: 118), let alone race, gender, sexuality, disability or any other protected characteristics. Shore's (2006: 18–19) vehement criticism of the construction of European identity and of documents that refer to European cultural heritage highlights the fact that these documents 'make virtually no mention of the contribution of writers, artists, scholars, and cultural practitioners of non-European descent' and that their contribution to the European project is ignored.<sup>1</sup> Overall, the slogan of 'unity in diversity' appears to be merely a 'bureaucratic formula fraught with ambiguities' (Shore 2006: 10), or 'either empty rhetoric or as hiding a centralising hegemonic project' (Sassatelli 2008: 231), where 'diversity has been acceptable only in so far as it does not jeopardise unity' (Delli 2017: 118). Despite all this, this flawed and simplistic concept of diversity remains influential today. As Wodak (2018) has recently observed, the presentation of diversity is mainly positive, highlighting the wealth of European states rather than the negative aspects.

In addition to reinforcing the idea of belonging to a shared space, land and community, many analyses of past ECoC have emphasised its support for regeneration and revitalisation processes (Immler and Sakkers 2014; Garcia and Cox 2013, etc). In this light, the theme of 'future' is connected with these projected transformations of the city. Most ECoCs of the past have included projects related to physical transformation (e.g. Lähdesmäki 2014; Garcia and Cox 2013). As Garcia and Cox (2013: 65) observed in their report, 'this notion of transformation has become prevalent', and an increased emphasis is placed on the legacy of the project and long-term effects. This is captured in our study under the theme of future, whereby we include both the prevalent objective of generating 'culture-led urban regeneration' (Sassatelli 2008: 236), and also visions of an imagined future for the city and the proposed impacts of the programme. The theme of the future was deemed more suitable rather than that of legacy commonly discussed in EC (2014b); Palmer (2004) and others, for its semantic complexity and wider application.

Discussing these themes is essential to reflect on the cities' Europeanness presented through this mega-festival, 'aimed at strengthening their belonging to the European cultural and social sphere' (Lähdesmäki 2014: 483).

### 11.3 Data and method

Our study uses the ECoC bid books of Valletta, Plovdiv and Galway as the data for the analysis. It also draws on ECoC guidelines/policies (EC 2014b) as the background and main reference to this data, in particular when it looks at the above themes intertextually.

To investigate the European Heritage themes and discourses of Europeaness that are used by Valletta, Plovdiv and Galway in the ECoC bids, we are using discourse analysis, and in particular elements of the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). Carter, Freeman and Lawn (2015: 2) have argued that Europe has long been imagined ‘as an object – an entity of one sort or another, but an object nonetheless’. Such monolithic views of Europe ignore its constructed (politically, economically, but also socially, culturally and discursively) and therefore dynamic nature. In our study of how cities construct and promote their Europeaness for the ECoC bid, we are using discourse analytical methods to capture not only the specific strategies used but also the changes in their representation of their Europeaness, depending on which theme(s) they decide to focus on. We will be focusing on the analysis of texts and will not be using a multimodal approach including visual semiotics, for instance.

Due to space and time constraints, the above both ‘semantic and latent relevant themes’ (Braun and Clarke 2006) of ‘Europe’, ‘heritage’, ‘diversity’ and ‘future’ were selected after a preliminary analysis. We identify and analyse these themes as *topoi* of Europeaness used in the candidate cities’ bid books. *Topoi* (the plural of *topos*, from the Greek, meaning ‘place’) constitute argumentation frames (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 55; Wodak 2018: 78 and elsewhere) and may be categorized into *topoi* of history or knowledge, for example (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 80). These *topoi* implicitly map onto the ECoC guidelines, policies and websites.

In this study, we understand ‘discourses’ broadly – not as narratives specifically, but as (re)presentations of collective memory expressed and realised through texts (see Fairclough 1992; but also Wodak 2018; 2011 and her previous works). Fairclough (1992, 2003, 2015) has rightly emphasised that it is impossible to capture the entirety of a discourse, because discourses go beyond a text to include the (social, political, cultural, economic) context. But discourses are also ways of representing lifeworlds (Habermas 1987) and subjectivities, and discourses are constructed and produced for specific purposes. Lähdesmäki (2014) frames her analysis in social constructionism. We adopt a similar and perhaps stronger approach, in line with German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, who argued that meaning (*Sinn*) is nothing more than a selection made by a social system.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars who have investigated narratives and discourses of Europeaness and European heritage have used narrative analysis (Lähdesmäki 2017; Kølvrå 2015 on mythical narratives), Critical Discourse Analysis (Krzyżanowski 2010; Mole 2007), the Discourse Historical Approach (Wodak 2018; Reisigl and Wodak 2015) or the Discourse Mythological Approach (Kelsey 2015; Lähdesmäki

2018). Narrative analysis is not suited to our aims of identifying themes as *topoi* of Europeanness, because these *topoi* are constructed on the basis of linguistic strategies aiming at promoting the cities in question to win the ECoC bid. These are different from strategies of identity building or identity construction but instead refer to identity reinvention and branding for a specific purpose.

The Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) constitutes a Discourse Analytical method developed by Ruth Wodak (see, for example, Reisigl and Wodak 2001), who has written extensively on the discursive construction of European identities (for example, Wodak 2018). Glynos et al. (2009) offer a good overview and explication of Wodak's transdisciplinary method. They explain that DHA belongs to the same family as CDA, but instead of focussing on structures of power and inequality, DHA focuses on the interdependence of discourse and sociopolitical change (Wodak 2018), which means that it often needs to be combined with fieldwork and ethnography (Glynos et al. 2009: 20). In our case, the analysis of texts is combined with fieldwork in Valletta and Galway in May and June 2018, while Plovdiv's analysis is supported by secondary material. More importantly, in examining discourse and sociopolitical change, DHA focusses on the 'memory of practices' (Reisigl and Wodak 2001). In this way, history and memory are brought to the fore 'as a relevant context that needs to be taken into account' (Glynos et al. 2009: 19).

There is a noticeable lack of useful accounts of how to conduct and write up a discourse analysis (except, for instance, Goodman 2017). Glynos et al. (2009) offer a comprehensive overview of the main approaches and techniques to the study of discourse, namely: discursive devices, rhetorical strategies, interactional resources, rhetorical resources and subject positions (how speakers construct themselves and others in discourse). We will be referring to these general discourse analytic devices, together with intertextuality. However we will be using Wodak's DHA model, as presented in Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 2015) and Wodak (2018). According to this model, DHA analysis consists of two levels: a) entry-level analysis, which focusses on the thematic dimension of the texts being analysed and maps out their contents; and b) in-depth analysis, which is informed by the research questions and involves the identification of the genre, analysis of macro-structure of the respective text, strategies of identity construction and of argumentation schemes and analysis of other means of linguistic realisation (Wodak 2018). The in-depth analysis will involve the categorisation into relevant content-related *topoi*, as mentioned above, and the results of the analysis 'will be interpreted taking into account the knowledge of the relevant context' (Wodak 2018: 8).

## 11.4 The case studies

Before discussing the discourses of the Valletta (Malta), Galway (Ireland) and Plovdiv (Bulgaria) bids, in line with Wodak's (2018) approach to DHA, we are providing some contextual information and points of collective memory that contributed to framing the discourse of the bids.



The first case study, Valletta, the capital of the small state of Malta and a World Heritage site, is a fortified city founded by the Knights of St John in the 1500s (see Figure 11.1). The history and landscape of the city is marked by waves of colonialism that have left behind a patchwork of built and intangible heritage that the ECoC bid has drawn on. As several observers have noted (for instance, Mitchell's 2002a, 2002b, 2018 studies are worth mentioning), Malta's accession to the EU posited problems at the societal level. The modern ways associated with Europeanisation were perceived as going against traditional ways of life, leading to 'a profound ambivalence' (Mitchell 2002b: 44).

To create the bid and implement the project, a dedicated structure was created, Valletta 2018 (V18 as it is commonly referred to). The Nationalist



*Figure 11.1* Valletta 2018 programmes stand (Photo: Cristina Clopot, 2018)



Party was in power when the Maltese received their nomination news in 2011 and started preparing the 2018 bid. Following elections in 2017, Labour leader, Joseph Muscat was sworn in as Prime Minister. The political change led to a change in the top management of the foundation, including the Executive Director, Programme Coordinator and Visual Arts Curator. To complicate matters further, an incident that drew the attention of international media was the death of local journalist and government critic, Daphne Caruana Galizia, a moment that Mitchell (2018: 62) notes ‘led to a major crisis of conscience in Malta’. Following this, the V18 Foundation’s chief became the target of national and then international calls for his resignation.<sup>3</sup> The development of the programme and its perception were marked by these controversies at the heart of a programme focused on re-branding the image of its capital city.

Galway’s case has raised similar controversy, although the setting is different, both in terms of the history it draws on as well as the particularity of the application for the title, following the enhanced guidelines (see Figure 11.2). Set on the west coast of Ireland, the city is one of the major outposts of the Gaeltacht (the Irish-speaking region of Ireland). Similar to Valletta, Galway has a thriving tourism industry. In size, Galway is the middle city in terms of inhabitants, with about 80,000 people living in the city. As the bid highlights: ‘The people of Galway are known for their fierce independence, forged by resistance to



Figure 11.2 Galway city centre (Photo: Cristina Clopot, 2018)

centuries of oppression and the harshness of our way of life on the western edge of Europe' (Galway2020 2016: 3). The statement hints at the fact that, similar to Valletta, Galway's history is marked by colonialism and struggles such as the nineteenth-century famine. The bid document further mentions that the geographical position, on the edge, also affords Galway a position as a bridge between Europe and America. The controversy in Galway's case relates to the difficulties encountered by the Galway 2020 Foundation in fulfilling their mission and preparing the 2020 programme, which included the resignation of the creative director, the CEO of the foundation as well as the public withdrawal of one of their main partners and board member, the Druid Theatre<sup>4</sup> (see, for instance, Siggins 2018).

The last case study included here, that of Plovdiv, brings another dimension to the study by extending the analysis to the eastern borders of the EU. Plovdiv is an ancient city, the second largest city in Bulgaria, with about 300,000 inhabitants (Plovdiv2019 2014). Petrova and Hristov (2016: 1) note the city's protracted history as 'one of the oldest living urban areas in Europe' was marked by Thracian, Byzantine, Roman and Ottoman heritages among others. Similar to the other two case studies, the city's history relates to colonialism. More recently, the city's past was marked by the communist period. Plovdiv's designation was met with enthusiasm, similar to the other cities discussed here, as an occasion to address a problematic present, where culture and heritage are not as valued today: 'We are proud of the European culture that built Plovdiv over the millennia, but now culture seems dispensable to many citizens and Europe feels far away' (Plovdiv2019 2014: 4). Taking a similar view to other post-socialist cities that have received the designation (e.g., Pécs, Maribor, Pilsen (Plzeň), Wrocław), Plovdiv's involvement seems to be influenced by the common realisation that the East and West division of Europe still marks relationships today (see also Turşie 2015). In this respect, ECoC would present an opportunity to place the city firmly on the European map and 'broaden the notion on Europe and European cultural identity by narrating the socialist history, heritage and experience as part of Europeanness' (Lähdesmäki 2014: 491). This amicable contrast between the socialist past and the European future as complementing each other makes Plovdiv's bid stand out from the others.

## 11.5 Analysis

A first reading of the text has identified a series of rhetorical devices that outline common patterns of discourse in the ECoC bids, which are connected with the themes discussed above: synecdoche, repetition, the use of pronouns or adverbs.

### 11.5.1 *Europeanness: tensions between topoi of history and geography*

With regard to the European dimension, all bids are using a trope of Europeanness that is allegedly rooted in their history. This '*topos* of history' is

problematic, as in each case aspects of national or local history are purposefully framed as European, ignoring any tensions that may have existed (or still exist). The most common rhetorical device used to mitigate the local/national – European tension is that of making use of a synecdoche, a strategy, which constitutes using part of a concept to refer to its entirety. Galway's bid for instance notes: 'We identify in ourselves a microcosm of the current existential challenges to Europe and our core values as Europeans' (Galway2020 2016: 3). Plovdiv's bid also highlights this idea that the local represents the European in a smaller scale:

In the process of transforming the objectives into project concepts we have focussed on themes that are important for Plovdiv but also relate to the bigger picture of issues being discussed and tackled in other parts of Europe.  
[Plovdiv2019 2014: 34]

To substantiate the problematic<sup>5</sup> 'European dimension', cities have made recourse to similar legitimisation strategies by reflecting on the pertinence of the themes on a wider scale: 'Migration, language and landscape are elemental themes in the make-up of Galway, as they are in European and world cultures' (Galway2020 2016: 4). In line with the reviewed guidelines for the bidding process, the references to Europe and the European dimension, although not necessarily less problematic, are better emphasised in Galway's bid. A repetition that stands out in the Galway bid is that of 'European partners'. This trope of collaboration is also one of the most popular strategies to emphasise the Europeanness of the programme in Valletta and Plovdiv (Palmer 2004).

Despite the *topos* of history and tropes of collaboration and Europeanness, it is interesting to note that all three candidate cities position themselves outside the perceived European geographical space.

Malta's marked history of close ties with Europe is inspirational for today's artistic collaboration.

[Valletta2018 2012: 32]

It is readily acknowledged that Europe has made enormous economic and social investment in Ireland. It is not therefore surprising that we are now reaching out to Europe, as never before.

[Galway2020 2016: 3]

In a similar manner, an interviewee in Malta described the festivals and events included as: 'They feel more like we're exporting Malta to Europe rather than we're importing Europe to Malta, or we're celebrating our Europeanness'.

The '*topos* of geographical position' and specifically on the margin of Europe (East, West, South) also unites the three case studies, each of the candidate cities reflecting on their placement on the map of Europe in legitimisation strategies: 'Valletta, though placed on the edge of Europe, will put itself firmly at the

centre of European cultural activity' (Valletta2018 2012: 39). Similarly Plovdiv is 'a city on the "edge" of Europe' (Plovdiv2019 2014: 32). Most of the arguments turn the geographical position on the edges into a positive aspect, opening connections to surrounding non-European neighbours, 'at the centre of a web of international cultures' (Galway2020 2016: 3) reminiscent of Delanty's view of European identity and European heritage shaped by inter-connections. The use of interactional markers such as first person pronouns are indicative in this sense also, with the pronouns used to mark locality rather than Europeanness, the city. For instance, the Plovdiv bid mentions: 'We have a huge European cultural heritage – Plovdiv is older than Athens and Rome' (Plovdiv2019 2014: 4).

Whereas Galway is the oldest member of the three studied, questions of European identities are not better addressed than in the case of the others. For example, the bid proposes that the ECoC title will encourage the first generation of Irish people to feel deeply European: 'without compromising our pride in wearing the Maroon or the Green jersey' (Galway2020 2016: 5).

### 11.5.2 (*Topoi of*) *Heritage, unity and history*

All three bids make recourse to notions of both tangible and intangible heritage, relating to both local and European heritage, although the local/national heritage takes precedence. This could be categorised as a distinct *topos* of heritage itself.

Galway, for instance, reflects on ECoC as an occasion 'to joyfully celebrate *our* unique cultural heritage' (Galway2020 2016: 30, added emphasis). The main elements that are brought to the fore are natural heritage (labelled as landscape) and language. Although migration features as one of the main themes of the bid, the reference to *migrant heritage* is mainly included under the umbrella of multilingualism. The local heritage elements the bid draws on are varied, including religious heritage, storytelling, folklore, dancing and literary heritage.

Within this *topos* of heritage, where Europeanness is built by reflecting on common themes, the sub-*topos* of unity is evoked rather than making recourse to the *topos* of history. Several of the projects promoted include similar locations from Europe, such as the Monument project (for example, Galway2020 2016: 14) which aims to reflect built heritage on several European islands. Although the reference to 'shared heritage' is repeated several times, its contents remain vague at the bid stage, with the only instances of actualisation presented through European music, European fairy-tales and the Gilgamesh epic (Galway2020 2016: 42).

Although Galway would be expected to draw more on European heritage, it is Plovdiv that makes more explicit recourse to European heritage, created through a metacultural operation, mainly through the *topos* of history: 'Plovdiv contributed to the model of the European city in the past' (Plovdiv2019 2014: 6). Shared heritage with particular countries and areas of Europe is also reflected through the inclusion of projects related to Thracians and the Etruscans, the Cyrillic alphabet, the Bauhaus movement and Homer's legacy.

Moreover, hinting at the contentious socialist legacy, Plovdiv aims ‘to open up a discussion on the European level about problematic architectural heritage in the contemporary context’ (Plovdiv2019 2014: 46). Local heritage is also present, of course, mainly through built heritage but also through a series of intangible elements such as the ‘Chitalishta community centres’ of the past, music and crafts.

A notable commonality for the case studies, not always reflected in the discourse of the bids, is the understanding of heritage as belonging to the past, an outmoded commodity to be used for the purposes of tourism. For instance, the Plovdiv programme ‘aims at reviving the cultural heritage and connecting it to the contemporary context’ (Plovdiv2019 2014: 63). Similarly, Valletta’s bid book presents contradictions to the vision presented in the final programme. Various local crafts, built environment and shared heritage items (mainly Mediterranean – for example seafaring traditions) are reflected in the bid book:

Our heritage, seen in street life, festivals, museums, cultural events and buildings and in the Maltese language, is a springboard for learning and appreciation, enabling deeper awareness of our unique social and cultural environment.

[Valletta2018 2012: 18]

However, the final programme, available online, as well as the discussions with different Maltese interviewees reflected a different view: ‘We are very much past oriented so obviously heritage is a very important aspect in our identity, in who we are and what we have, but we found it sometimes a bit challenging to sort of ensure that we are also a bit forward-looking’ (V18 representative 2018). In a similar vein, one of the Galway interviewees reflected on the need to use the future tense in writing the bids.

### ***11.5.3 Diversity and the topos of unity***

The *topos* of unity represents a further common theme, either as a *topos* in its own right, or as a sub-*topos* of heritage, realising in discourse the controversial adage of the EU ‘unity in diversity’ discussed in section 3 above. In Plovdiv’s case, the topos of unity is conveyed through the repetition of the adverb ‘together’, sometimes ambiguously: “‘Plovdiv Together” wants to unite what is now divided in the city’ (Plovdiv2019 2014: 7). The concept, while mainly referring to the city and its inhabitants, aims for a dual understanding, bringing the European dimension to the fore: ‘This is supposed to be Europe? The diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, “together” Europe that Plovdiv claims to be part of?’ (Plovdiv2019 2016: 4). The Plovdiv bid makes use of such rhetorical questions to address problematic interactions and tensions between ethnic groups (e.g., the ghettoisation of Roma) as well as lack of dialogue. Moreover, the Plovdiv bid also uses persuasive elements such as emphatic adverbs (e.g., ‘will undoubtedly add a high level of expertise’ (Plovdiv2019 2016: 14), ‘they

demonstrate the absolute necessity of finding the true meaning of the word “together” (Plovdiv2019 2016: 8)).

In most of the instances, diversity is perceived mainly in a positive light, through the *topos* of unity:

We *firmly* believe that the similarities within us, be it in the different groups in Plovdiv or the different cultures in Europe, are more and stronger than the differences.

[Plovdiv2019 2014: 4, added emphasis]

The ECOC creates a secure space in which to celebrate and exchange our cultural diversity.

[Galway2020 2016: 3]

Yet, unlike Wodak’s (2018) recent study emphasising the positive view of diversity, negative patterns emerge in the texts of the bids also.

The Balkans share a common space and history but between the countries there are many unresolved problems. We often forget that there is more to unite than to divide us.

[Plovdiv2019 2014: 44]

Malta is a place of diverse cross-cultural exchanges, whether for trade, tourism or even as a refuge. However not all of these encounters are necessarily comfortable ones.

[Valletta2018 2012: 24]

The antithesis is used to position Galway in a better position than the rest of Europe, echoing in particular the crisis generated by the refugee situation: ‘While Europe struggles against a wave of closing borders, hearts and minds, Galway is seeking to challenge ambivalence towards difference and diversity’ (Galway2020 2016: 15). Overall, the image of diversity constructed discursively is mainly that of ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. Each of the three bids presents their own ‘others’. In the case of Valletta these are not clearly outlined, presented under the general label of immigrants, although a mention of a detention centre suggests connection to refugees, a topical theme for current Maltese society. Galway does not highlight specific groups either but notes that immigrants form 24% of its population. Plovdiv’s emphasis is mainly placed on the Roma as well as historic minorities: Jews, Greeks, Armenians and Turks.

#### **11.5.4 Future: *topos* of change**

The theme of the future also permeates the bids, although markedly so in the case of Plovdiv and Galway. Arguably, the main *topos* presented in connection to this theme is that of change: ‘Our vision for Galway 2020 is that it will be

a catalyst for a future of inclusivity, participation and cultural sustainability' (Galway2020 2016:4). Plovdiv's view of the future outlines the ambitious objectives included in the programme, with culture-led regeneration centre-stage: 'Our approach to the future, with the project ECoC as a stepping stone, is to apply culture as a strategy to support even seemingly culture-unrelated issues' (Plovdiv2019 2014: 24). The rhetoric construction of the future is not clearly articulated in any of the bids analysed. The basic ethos resonates that of previous ECoCs of driving social, cultural and economic transformation. For instance Valletta2018's (2012: 4) bid includes a statement such as: 'It is inspired by its call to imagine a future which is better than its present'. Moreover, all bids share the view that the implementation of the programme will lead to a renewed interest and participation in cultural activities. They furthermore emphasise the objectives related to empowering creative industries within their cities and upscaling cultural provision.

## **11.6 Conclusion**

We began our chapter with a statement, that Europe is represented by more than banknotes and economic shared spaces. The ECoC mega-festival, with its complex programming over a year of events and festival, presents a productive case study to reflect on what Europeanness might mean and how it is implemented bottom-up (Lähdesmäki 2016b). The three case studies selected present similar challenges and offer food for thought for European policies of integration as well as the current cultural agenda. As our discursive analysis has shown, although ECoC aims to promote shared European heritage, cities find the notion as vague as the academic discourse has found it, and devise particular strategies to approach it by drawing on shared histories or shared (constructed) themes of relevance for several countries.

In similar vein with previous studies (Lähdesmäki 2016b; Shore 2006; Sassatelli 2002; Strani, Klein and Hill 2017 and others), our analysis has highlighted the difficulties in actualising in discourse the European dimension. The geographical and historical positioning of these cities reflects the complexities of the ECoC programme, as well as its possible shortcomings in fostering a sense of shared identity. In these bids, Europe is most commonly elsewhere, a non-defined space to interact with rather than substantively belong to. The local and the national (heritage) thus take central stage, and all three cities emphasise the opportunity to propel themselves upwards in the hierarchy of European cities.

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## Notes

- 1 For a discussion of ‘whiteness’ and ‘diversity’ in a European context, see Strani, Klein and Hill (2017).
- 2 For a concise overview of Luhmann’s social systems theory and his concept of *Sinn* in particular, see Strani (2010).
- 3 Among these there was a petition signed by 100 creative industries professionals and artists, open letters from PEN international and an open letter signed by MEPs. (see, for instance, Pen International 2018; Anonymous 2018).
- 4 The Druid Theatre is an important player in the local cultural scene as one of the main Irish-speaking theatre companies in the city.
- 5 Indeed, a more critical view is stated in interviews. One of the interviewees in Galway, a member of the bidding team, reflected: ‘It’s a really tough ask; you can’t sell the people of the city on this idea of celebrating a European dimension’.

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